

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 SAM-01 /060 W

----- 106208

P R 031450Z MAR 76

FM AMEMBASSY ROME

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6102

AMEMBASSY BONN

INFO AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY LONDON

USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L ROME 3493

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFINT, PFOR, IT, GW

SUBJECT: SCHMIDT'S VIEWS ON ITALIAN COMMUNISTS RECEIVES WELCOME

1. SUMMARY. CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT'S RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PARTY (PCI) DURING A FEBRUARY 25 WORKING LUNCHEON IN BONN FOR THE FOREIGN PRESS CORPS RECEIVED A WELCOME RECEPTION FROM THE ITALIAN COMMUNIST PRESS. THE COVERAGE IN OTHER SEGMENTS OF THE ITALIAN PRESS WAS SLIGHTLY LESS SENSATIONAL. COMING AS THEY DID FOLLOWING PRESIDENT FORD'S REMARKS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE ABOUT COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN NATO GOVERNMENTS, THE CHANCELLOR'S COMMENTS WERE INTERPRETED BY THE PCI AS INDICATING DIFFERENCES OF OPINION WITHIN NATO ON THIS QUESTION. END SUMMARY.

2. PREDICTABLY, CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT'S COMMENTS ON FEBRUARY 25 TO FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS ON THE SUBJECT OF POSSIBLE PCI PARTICIPATION IN AN ITALIAN GOVERNMENT RECEIVED MORE THAN PASSING ATTENTION IN THE ITALIAN PRESS. WHILE WE HAVE NOT SEEN THE FULL TEXT OF THE CHANCELLOR'S REMARKS, ALL THE ACCOUNTS OF THEM WHICH WE HAVE OBSERVED HAVE POINTED OUT THAT HE APPROACHED THE PRESS QUESTIONS IN A CAUTIOUS MANNER.

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3. UNDERSTANDABLY, THE COMMUNISTS DISPLAYED VIRTUALLY UNRESTRAINED JOY OVER THE CHANCELLOR'S COMMENTS, HEADLINING THE COVERAGE FEBRUARY 27 IN THE PARTY DAILY L'UNITA: "SCHMIDT: NATO IS SUFFICIENTLY 'ELASTIC' TO INCLUDE GOVERNMENTS WITH COMMUNISTS." ACCORDING TO L'UNITA, SCHMIDT POINTED TO COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION IN THE GOVERNMENTS OF ICELAND AND PORTUGAL AS INDICATING THAT NATO COULD POSSIBLY LIVE WITH A SIMILAR DEVELOPMENT IN ITALY. L'UNITA ALSO OBSERVED THAT SCHMIDT'S COMMENTS ARE IN DIRECT CONTRAST WITH THOSE OF PRESIDENT FORD AT KEENE WHO ARGUED AGAINST THE PARTICIPATION OF COMMUNISTS IN NATO GOVERNMENTS REGARDLESS OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES.

4. CORRIERE DELLA SERA FEBRUARY 27 HAS MORE COMPLETE COVERAGE OF THE CHANCELLOR'S REMARKS THAN L'UNITA. (REPORTING IN OTHER NON-COMMUNIST NEWSPAPERS GENERALLY FOLLOWED THAT OF CORRIERE.) ACCORDING TO THE NEWSPAPER'S BONN CORRESPONDENT, SCHMIDT WAS SOMEWHAT MORE CIRCUMSPECT THAN INFERRED BY L'UNITA. AFTER TALKING ABOUT ICELAND--THE COMMUNISTS LEFT THE GOVERNMENT AND THUS THE PROBLEM DISAPPEARED--AND PORTUGAL--COMMUNIST PARTICIPATION CREATED A GRAVE SITUATION BUT NATO DIDN'T RAISE A FINGER EVEN THOUGH THERE WAS SERIOUS PREOCCUPATION--, SCHMIDT REPORTEDLY SAID THAT "IT IS NOT THAT NATO WILL BEHAVE IN THE SAME WAY IN THE FUTURE; ITS ATTITUDE WILL DEPEND ON MANY FACTORS. THE FINAL DECISION WILL BE TAKEN IN THE VARIOUS CAPITALS: PARIS, BONN, LONDON, THE HAGUE, BRUSSELS, DUBLIN (SIC), ETC." IN ANALYZING THE COMMENTS, THE CORRESPONDENT CONCLUDES THAT SCHMIDT REJECTS OUT OF HAND THE IDEA OF AUTOMATICALLY EXCLUDING ITALY FROM NATO IF THE PCI ENTERS THE GOVERNMENT.

5. NOT WISHING TO PASS UP A GOOD OPPORTUNITY, L'UNITA MARCH 1 RETURNED TO THE SCHMIDT REMARKS IN THE FORM OF A LONG ANALYSIS BY ALBERTO JACOVIELLO, FOREIGN EDITOR OF THE NEWSPAPER. AFTER NOTING THAT THE INCREASING NUMBER OF COMMENTS BY SENIOR OFFICIALS OF NATO COUNTRIES ABOUT THE PCI PARTICIPATION IN AN ITALIAN GOVERNMENT INDICATES THAT THE QUESTION IS NO LONGER HYPOTHETICAL BUT REAL, JACOVIELLO GOES ON TO OBSERVE THE CONTRASTS BETWEEN THE POSITIONS TAKEN BY PRESIDENT FORD, GENERAL HAIG, AND CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT. OBVIOUSLY IT IS THE SCHMIDT VIEWPOINT UPON WHICH HE DWELLS SINCE IT SIGNALS, ACCORDING TO HIM, DIVISIONS IN NATO RANKS ON THE ISSUE. JACOVIELLO FINDS CONFIDENTIAL

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PARTICULARLY INTERESTING SCHMIDT'S STATEMENT THAT ANY DECISION ON ITALY'S CONTINUED NATO MEMBERSHIP IN CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD BE BASED ON A COLLECTIVE DECISION AMONG NATO MEMBERS, BECAUSE IT EXCLUDES THE AUTOMATIC ACTION IMPLICIT IN THE APPROACH OF THE AMERICAN LEADERS AND BECAUSE IT DEMONSTRATES THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE AMERICAN POSITION MIGHT NOT BE THE DECISIVE ONE. IN SUM, JACOVIELLO FINDS THE SCHMIDT APPROACH SUBSTANTIALLY MORE REALISTIC AND IN LINE WITH THE IDEA THAT

THE SITUATION IN EUROPE IS NOT IMMUTABLE.

6. JACOVIELLO THEN GOES ON TO NOTE THAT OBVIOUSLY PCI PARTICIPATION IN NATO WOULD PRESENT REAL PROBLEMS FOR THE ORGANIZATION BOTH POLITICALLY AND MILITARILY IN TERMS OF THE TRANSFORMATION WHICH THE PCI BELIEVES NATO SHOULD UNDERGO. FOR JACOVIELLO, AND PRESUMABLY FOR THE PCI, NATO SHOULD NO LONGER BE VIEWED AS AN INSTRUMENT OF AMERICAN TAMPERING IN ITALY AND INDEED IN WESTERN EUROPE. JACOVIELLO REITERATES THAT THE PARTY DOES NOT WISH TO SEE THE EUROPEAN EQUILIBRIUM MODIFIED UNILATERALLY WHILE AT THE SAME TIME IT DESIRES TO SEE A RECONSIDERATION OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ITALY AND WESTERN EUROPE ON THE ONE HAND AND THE TWO SUPER POWERS ON THE OTHER HAND. FOR THE TIME BEING, THE AMERICAN LEADERSHIP DOES NOT SEEM PREPARED TO CONDUCT A DISCUSSION ALONG THESE TERMS. (JACOVIELLO CHOOSES TO IGNORE WHETHER THE SOVIETS WOULD BE WILLING TO TALK ALONG THESE TERMS, ALTHOUGH PRESUMABLY THE SOVIETS COULD TAKE SATISFACTION IN PROCESSES WHICH LED TO A WEAKENING OF NATO WITH LITTLE OR NO CHANGE IN THEIR DEFENSIVE ARRANGEMENT). AS HIS FINALE, JACOVIELLO DRAWS ATTENTION ONCE AGAIN TO THE INFLEXIBLE AND UNREALISTIC NATURE OF AMERICAN POLICY TOWARDS ITALY IN PARTICULAR AND EUROPE IN GENERAL. FROM HIS STANDPOINT, " IT WOULD NOT BE BAD IF THEY (AMERICAN LEADERS) WOULD TAKE INTO CONSIDERATION THE FACT THAT IN ITALY THEY HAVE TRIED EVERYTHING POSSIBLE TO MAINTAIN A CONSENSUS AROUND WHAT AMERICA REPRESENTED IN EUROPE. AND IT IS NOW BEING LOST."

7. COMMENT: FROM OUT VANTAGE POINT, THE SCHMIDT EPISODE ILLUSTRATES THE ADVANTAGES THAT ACCRUE TO THE PCI FROM STATEMENTS BY WESTERN OFFICIALS WHICH EITHER BY DESIGN OR BY INADVERTENT WORD USAGE IMPLY ANYTHING LESS THAN COMPLETE OPPOSITION TO THE CONCEPT OF THE PARTY'S ENTRY INTO AN ITALIAN GOVERNMENT. IN TERMS OF THIS PARTICULAR INCIDENT ONLY BONN

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IS IN A POSITION TO ASCERTAIN PRECISELY WHAT CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT SAID AND TO COMMENT ON THE UTILITY OF BRINGING THE ITALIAN PRESS PLAY TO THE ATTENTION OF HIS OFFICE. VOLPE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PRESS COMMENTS, SPEECHES, POLITICAL PARTIES, RELATIONS WITH REGIONAL ORGS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 MAR 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ShawDG
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ROME03493
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760081-0102
From: ROME
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760399/aaaadjky.tel
Line Count: 157
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ShawDG
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 24 MAR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <24 MAR 2004 by MartinML>; APPROVED <04 AUG 2004 by ShawDG>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SCHMIDT'S VIEWS ON ITALIAN COMMUNISTS RECEIVES WELCOME
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, IT, GE, NATO, (SCHMIDT, HELMUT)
To: STATE BONN
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006